



Book Review: South Asian women in the diaspora

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environment and within and among skin–blood histories; together, race, nature and difference chart locations of decay and possibility on and beyond the racial body. Environmental pollution, land claim struggles, skulls, disease/health, nationalism, intimacy, tourism, genetics and violences demonstrate the consequences of skin–blood essentialisms and the limitations of their attendant geographies which include nationalist projects, outer-national ‘crusades’ for Western democracy, territorialization, border security, racial-sexual segregations. For example: ideologies of blood – nation-community-purity naturalize social and spatial hierarchies, thus reinforcing expendable geographies and subjects; the scale of the racial body is inscribed with natural blood-histories – risky bodies ‘carry’ risky genes; biotechnologies simultaneously – destabilize and stabilize nature-places and racialization.

While the political and theoretical positions of the essays vary, it is the twofold *spatialization* of new humanism and racial genealogies (alternative conceptualizations and historicizations of humanness) that demonstrate the ways in which nature, and the natural, are infused with all sorts of geographical politics. This is the uniqueness of the text: it does not simply replicate or describe analyses of race and place, anti-racism or racial injustice; rather it seeks to undo blood-essentialisms by exploring the seeming naturalness, or transparency, of geography and its inhabitants. What I mean by this is that the authors take seriously the role played by nature in determining spatial allegiances, desires and rifts, and the ways in which ideological ‘naturalisms’ are invoked in situated contexts. By refusing to complement one side of racial essence debates (as resistant or emancipatory), each essay imagines the possibilities advanced by ongoing struggles which are never resolved: what kind of politics, articulations and geographies, then, are forged *through* social struggle?

The arguments do not only seek to ‘denature’ race and nature and their commonsensical truths. They also hinge on recognizing how essences are lived and constructed through alterity and the work and the workings of subaltern political subjects. It is the work and workings of political subjects – taken up differently in each chapter and ranging from environmental activism to dog breeding and native geographies, spanning the USA, Guatemala, South Africa, Germany, Indonesia – that create innovative theoretical and everyday sites of opposition. The text offers not simply maps of difference, but locations where difference, and struggle are wrought with the demands of natural, commonsensical, sometimes violent truths.

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KATHERINE MCKITTRICK

South Asian women in the diaspora. Edited by Nirmal Puwar and Parvati Raghuram. Oxford: Berg. 2003. 252pp. £15.99 paper. ISBN: 1 85973 602 5.

In the last decade, there has been an expansion of research and publications in the US and UK on South Asian women in the diaspora, within the contexts of identity, visual culture, transnationalism, material culture and literature. This edited collection is a rich and extensive set of interventions into the disabling paradigms within which South

Asian women are located, including a narrow set of temporal and spatial geographies. It is an essential read, and offers a challenge for all geographers engaged with these literatures. The text is a stark reminder of the continuing acceptability of an Orientalist lens through which ethnographies and academic literatures are received, produced and reproduced. *South Asian women in the diaspora* is a collection written by South Asian women within the academy who theorize from a position of being producers and subjects of research within the institutions of knowledge production. This collection offers a critical review of the nature of the racial politics within the academy, and an insight into the sociology of knowledge production from the perspective of the South Asian academic. Here, the heterogeneity of South Asian women's academic interventions are explored, and thus challenge the usually reductive frame of subjective knowledges.

The first key theme within the text is the *objectification, essentialism* and limitation of intellectual agency afforded to South Asian women, reflecting the dynamics of race and the reductive dynamism within academic process. The second theme is the means through which stereotypes of South Asian women's embodied identities are purveyed in familiar iconographic forms. Nayanika Mookerjee examines the aestheticization of the raped woman as being incorporated within masculinist constructions of Bangladeshi nationalism, communicated through icons of nature and landscape. Bakirathi Mani also reviews the form of the South Asian body, within work on South Asian fashions in the West, as being one located in a cultural and homogenizing intellectual cul-de-sac. The third theme of the book is concerned with grounded approaches to South Asian spatial, identity, and participatory politics. In this section Rani Kwale records South Asian lesbian activism, which challenges the heterosexual matrix which structures spatial politics within society. Samina Zahir extends this concern with participatory practices in the context of community arts; here she examines the continued burden of representation played out within the political landscapes of community arts projects. This burden is expressed effectively by the editors in their development and promotion of a productive dialogue with social theory and practice within and outside the academy. Here, the gaze of those Othered is returned, and a variety of new lenses of academic enquiry are borne through new research trajectories and epistemological challenges.

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The companion species manifesto: dogs, people, and significant otherness. By Donna Haraway. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press. 2003. 100pp. \$10.00 paper. ISBN: 0 97175 758 5.

In this well-written, well-researched and thought-provoking essay, Haraway argues that a human's cross-species 'companion' relationship with a dog can tell and teach something profound about the importance of recognizing the facticity of difference and, hence, how to engage with 'significant otherness': 'Contrary to lots of dangerous and unethical projection in the Western world that makes domestic canines into furry