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Mexican immigrant experiences in New York, but rather offers an in-depth analysis of the Tiquanense community's specific transnational practices.

Drawing from the work of sociologist Alejandro Portes and his colleagues, Smith regards transnational life as practices and experiences that link individuals, families, and social networks across national boundaries—from sending country to receiving country—and that occur in significant number and in regular fashion. However, Smith also extends the notion of transnational life as it is embodied in identities and larger social structures that dialectically interact through the lived experiences of individuals. In emphasizing transnational life at the local level, Smith avoids “invoking the invisible hand of globalization.” In addition, he stresses the importance of the dual processes of migration and assimilation in influencing transnational practices. Rather than positing transnationalization and assimilation as counter-acting processes, Smith explores how the two are often deeply intertwined and result in differing outcomes for different individuals.

_Mexican New York_ is structured as an analysis of Tiquanense transnational life at three important sites. In the first site, Smith discusses the politics of first generation immigrants. Here he demonstrates how transnational political life intersects with local structures of power. Migrants in New York use their economic prowess to establish a significant transnational political presence in Tiquani, negotiating new power relations with the existing local political structures. At the second site, Smith analyzes gender relations among both first- and second-generation immigrants in New York, and he addresses how these relations mutate and evolve as migrants move back and forth between New York and Tiquani. Transnational life is important here because it is the site where gender roles are challenged and renegotiated, especially among adolescents and young adults. At the third site, Smith examines the varying assimilation experiences of teenage students, specifically as they relate to the students’ involvement in ‘crews’ or ‘gangs,’ which Smith refers to as _pandilleros_. Smith argues that _pandilleros_ fill a structural void for adolescents by offering a sense of belonging and increased social status within peer groups. Transnational practices are significant in that they allow for the recruitment of adolescents in Tiquani, where local social structures have been weakened by frequent out-migrations.

Smith recognizes that there are a number of positive outcomes from engaging in transnational life. It enables immigrants to retain some social status and political power in Mexico while living abroad. It enables parents to pass on cultural practices and institute cultural identities among their American born children (e.g., every year many migrants in New York return to Tiquani for the annual Feast of Padre Jesus). Through such practices, transnational life offers an arena in which second generation Mexican Americans seek to authenticate or legitimize their identity and “Mexican-ness.” Smith also acknowledges that transnational life can have darker and less often recognized outcomes as well. Harsh assimilation experiences, especially among adolescents, can lead to considerable confusion and antagonism. Transnational gang activity is both a symptom and result of such hardships, and Smith predicts that such activities will continue to proliferate across national borders.

This book contributes significantly to the study of migrations and transnational life. It documents the significance of Tiquanense transnational activities in both the sending and receiving countries. Contrary to what some might expect, transnational life continues for many beyond the first-generation and into the second-generation of Mexican Americans and beyond. Smith demonstrates the importance of transnational life for Mexican American adolescents growing up in New York. Transnational life offers the potential to help shape cultural identities and enables youths to negotiate the pressures of assimilation. In this way, transnational life is best understood in relation to the other factors that largely affect it, including political structures, changes in the life course, adolescence, gender relations, etc. _Mexican New York_ succeeds in extending transnationalization studies beyond the economic and political spheres, and it opens the door for scholars to engage with the cultural and social components of transnational life as well. Such an embedded analysis acknowledges the important role of larger structures and processes, yet it also stresses the agency of individual migrants and their children in constituting transnational practices.

--- Benjamin L. Blandford


The ever intriguing dynamics of postcolonial writing in the tradition of “writing back” assumes yet another dimension with the publication of _Other Routes: 1500 Years of African and Asian Travel Writing_. The anthology with multiple co-editorship by Tabish Khair, Martin Leer,
Justin Edwards and Hanna Ziadeh, is primarily concerned, as the title indicates, with travel writing in the African and Oriental Worlds. It is however not in the tradition of colonial and imperial writing of the West about these two worlds, but an introspective selection of the classics of travel accounts written by Africans and Asians, not only about themselves, but also about the West. Its wide range of focus, rather than yielding to excesses, turns out to be an enthralling representation of African and Asian itinerant writing across centuries as distant as the 5th to as recent as the 19th century. At one level, this work, which is also a display of intellectual accomplishment on the part of the editors with regard to selection and painstaking arrangement of themes, presents travel writing as an indigenous genre to the two worlds, and as an experience and documentation that is void of the condescending commentaries and derogations of the West about Africa and Asia. Indeed, it is without those prejudices of the colonial school was only to a derisive end; in which case, a queer African wizard has traveled in pursuit of a mere lamp. Neither is it about some exotic stories aimed at taming “the wild frontier, overcoming both hostile natives and a hostile land.” The selection, moreover, is not about the Orient whose human, cultural and geographic configuration must be denied despite all indications to the contrary. Rather, it is a fascinating collage of writings which celebrate Africa and Asia, while subtly instructing the West on the necessity of “cultivating humility” when writing about the traditions of others. If there is any explication for this, it is simply that it is high time the postcolonial world stood up and held its own concerning the challenge of self-representation. On the other hand, the anthology also documents an articulation of African and Asian perception of the West, highlighting forms of interaction not in the sense of the difference between the “Self” and the “Other”. Instead, it is a representation of series of interactions which show a historical interdependence bordering on all areas, especially those concerning epistemological and intellectual innovations from Africa and Asia, and from which the West has greatly benefited. That is, despite such denials that Africa and Asia were the first to civilize the West, the truth cannot remain hidden.

3 This view is central to the contention of Edward Said in Orientalism (London: Penguin, 1995).

Perhaps for the purpose of systematic clarity, which justifies the end of the publication, the writings are thematically divided into four parts. In the first part subtitled “Pilgrimages”, one encounters records of famous journeys made essentially for the consolidation of faiths. ‘The Chinese Scholars go West to India’ (Fifth to Seventh Century) is a revealing account of beautiful blends of pious quests with secular pleasures of interacting with the cultural dynamics of other people. So the pilgrims from China express their fascination with the ever changing name of the land of India— from Tianzlu to Xindu, etc.— and the piety of the natives’ sartorial design which the Buddhist pilgrims find worthy of emulation. Similarly, ‘The Travels of a Japanese Monk’, contributed by Lene Sondertby Bech as a 9th century piece, reveals the sincerity of the pursuit of faith in antiquity with desires that truly transcended the mundane. It explains the emotional response of Ennin and other fellow pilgrims on beholding from a mountainous summit “the gold-colored world of Mt. Qingliang where Manjusri manifested himself for our benefits” (p.45). Other contributions in this section are no less interesting and insightful, with some combining the prosaic style of narration with poetry, like in the case of “The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon (c. 999).

The second part, “Studies”, is an arrangement of series of rigorous intellectual undertakings documented in the course of itinerant vocations and careers. In ‘Al-Burum’s Defence of Hindu India’, among other works in the section, the author shows how the secular and the cultural can extract configuration from the religious as he reveals that much of Indian worldview, even in the distant past, was shaped more by Hindu precepts rather than by Islamic precepts. The subtext of ‘Navigating with ibn Majid’ takes the navigatory shine off the western flank. It was the protagonist’s record of experience, nautical and geographical, that helped Portuguese explorers and traders in the earliest times in being able to navigate for once from East Africa to India and to Vasco da Gama. ‘Leo Africanus’, a 16th century travel record, brings Africa into perspective by a Granadan-born Moroccan resident whose name is also Leo Africanus. He commends the intellectual accomplishment of the Near East especially in the area of arts and science, furthering this by admitting the “merry, jocund and cheerful disposition” of the citizens of Cairo (p.141). There is, however, an unfortunate tincture of his Oriental bias against the Negroid Africa as he observes that “They (Negroid Africans) spend all their days in most lewd practices, or in hunting, or else in warfare” (p.139).

In “Autobiographies, Diaries and Memoirs” there is a parade of sundry notes preoccupied with equally sundry concerns. The three extracts from ‘Memoirs of a Syrian Prince— Polymath’, for instance, touch on issues such as an ambassadorial experience in Egypt, the itinerary to the Prophet’s roots & routes
tomb in Mecca, and the various intrigues that characterized the administration of the sultanate in the post-medieval era. 'The Accidental Travels of a Korean Official' chronicles the tribulations that attend such journeys on the one hand, and on the other, the excitement that accompanies happy accidental discoveries. Olaudah Equiano's 'Voyage to Slavery and Freedom', a classic in African and African-American literature, also features expectedly in this anthology. This narrative of a freed African slave in the 19th century remains as always a testimony against the imperial West with relation to the invention and disposition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Forced into a strange land, although with relative magnanimity on the part of his captors, he says after the end of the long journey: "My griefs too... were now wearing away, and I soon enjoyed myself pretty well and felt tolerably easy in my present situation (p.200).

His accomplishments remain a telling trope of the African-American heroic resilience despite institutional racism. Among others in this section, of particular interest is the female angle to the travels. "An African-Arab Princess in Europe" shows one of the several tender slants of the anthology. This was a 19th century record of an African-Arab princess. Although "born to a Circassian slave in the royal harem of Oman and Zanzibar" (p.261), Emily Said-Ruete’s long travel stints in European countries and Christianity helped her to critique, in the words of the editors, “the hypocrisy of Western Orientalism and her travel text offers the voice of the ‘Oriental Other’." (p.261). But beyond this, the value of her contribution lies in its precursory relation to the insightful critical and theoretical reactions of the Orient to Western concept of Orientalism, a field the likes of Edward Said have since explored with great passion of learning.

In the fourth and final section subtitled "Travel Accounts", Ahmed ibn Fadhlan’s ‘Reports on a Viking Funeral’ (AD 922) makes a curious reading with what in the estimation of the traveler is not such a civilized way of burying their dead in the 10th century among the Vikings of Russia. But whatever his comments, it must be conceded as a substance of cultural shock which is best resolved by the acceptance of the fact of cultural relativism; otherwise, it could as well be read as a reversal of “cannibalism” discourse in postcolonial criticism. Al-Abdari’s ‘The Disgruntled Traveler’ is best understood as one of the few exceptions in the anthology as it reeks of inexplicable rage and aspersions on every city visited, whether in Egypt, or Libya. But it is to ‘Ibn Battuta, World Traveller’ (b. 1304) one must turn to find a globe trotter par excellence who also brings his anecdotal sense of humour to bear on his many journeys of coincidence. In the said series of journeys, he meets previously known people from Africa to Asia and to Europe, and gives an account which has an Afro-Asian magic to it. ‘The Poetry of Basho’s Road to the North (1689)’ nudges the forte of western Romanticism, suggesting that the tradition might have, after all, been experienced in Asia long before European literary tradition was caught in its revolutionary fever. Coming to a close with ‘Malabari: A Love-Hate Affair with the British (1893)’, which is an Indian account of Victorian England, this journey from India to London, creates an opportunity for lashing out at Britain’s linguistic arrogance, a tendency of empire which forces others to learn her language but never sees why she should learn others’. Nevertheless, British nationalism is commended as something that cuts across all facets. Above all, his record alerts one to the crucial issue about the relationship of Africa and Asia with the West: "...in England..., I appeal earnestly to treat us more like fellow-subjects" (p.376).

Even as the world moves impulsively towards the achievement of an agenda of oneness in the name of globalization, there is no doubt that the postcolonial world then, as it is now, demands only one thing of the West: to be treated equally with unreserved respect for its worldview. There is no doubt that Other Routes advances this line of argument.

--Senayon S. Olaoluwa