

Translocal Geographies: Spaces, Places, Connections,
by Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta eds., Burlington: Ashgate,
2011, 226 pp.

Translocal Geographies gathers a total of nine empirically original essays from an international context to demonstrate localities as constitutive of interrelations rather than viewing them as bounded and fixed. The essays draw on a range of theoretical and methodological nuances to argue along a common thread — that “spaces and places need to be examined both through their situatedness and their connectedness to a variety of other locales” (p.4). The editors of this collection, Katherine Brickell and Ayona Datta, structure the empirical materials into three main themes — home and family, neighbourhood, and cities — to consider a variety of spaces, places and connections implicated in the dynamics of migration. Readers will also appreciate a concluding essay by Michael Peter Smith where he critically reflects on the concept of translocality in the context of his own work, as well as sketching out several research questions for the study of translocal geographies. Scholars and students of migration will find this collection a valuable contribution to the existing lens of transnationalism to think about the simultaneously situated and mobile character of cross-border lives.

The book opens with an introduction that carefully details the concept of

‘translocality’ and sets it apart from the more widely deployed analytical lens of ‘grounded’ transnationalism. While a ‘grounded’ or ‘rooted’ transnationalism approach reminds us that “transnational migrants were never bereaved of locatedness” (p.9), Brickell and Datta warn that a fixation on the scale of the ‘national’ not only limits our understanding of the embodied experiences, practices and materialities involved in the (re)production of cross-border lives, it also subsumes important questions about local-local relations and connections. Instead, translocality draws attention to “the local as situated across a variety of scales – body, home, urban, regional or national”, therefore elucidating the multifaceted and diverse range of sites and registers from which (non-)migrant lives are actualized and politicized. The editors further suggest that in order to fully excavate the ‘situatedness’ of translocal subjects, it is important to consider locales as interconnected fields of practices through the concept of habitus. Habitus is viewed as “a dynamic theory of spatial embodiment and subjectivity” (p.12) which allows us to think of the translocal subject as constituted and positioned in relation to their shifting affiliations with different localities nested within a variety of scales. In another words, Brickell and Datta are mindful of the fact that migrant experiences and identities are not straightforward articulations centered on any one scale, but consist of a multi-scalar repertoire of connections between ‘here’ and ‘there’ that span across imaginations, practices, and affects.

Part 2 of the book features empirical materials from Southeast Asia, namely Cambodia, Thailand and Singapore, to demonstrate the centrality of home and family spaces in the forging of translocal affiliations. In all three essays, the temporal modality of migration emerges as an important lens to understand the affective and intimate geographies of home and family. Brickell (chap. 2) argues that for many Cambodians, home is an important site where personal attachments

are deeply intertwined with migratory histories as well as projections of imagined futures and aspirations for themselves and their children. This salience of time is also conveyed through the concept of nostalgia and place-making in both Tan and Yeoh's (chap. 3) study on Lahu rural-urban migrants and Hatfield's (chap. 4) research on British return migrants from Singapore.

In Part 3, neighbourhoods are shown to be situated communities that simultaneously connect to other cities, regions and nation as well as the rhythms of the street and home-making practices. Indeed, this is an argument made by Datta (chap. 5) and Wise (chap. 6) from their studies on Polish migrants and Sydney's 'Little Shanghai' respectively that the spaces of home, cities and neighbourhood are never quite separated from each other. Building on the view that the neighbourhood is connected to wider spatialities, Centner (chap. 7) focuses more specifically on the locale as a site of socio-economic resources and opportunities, and in the process demonstrates how 'global' aspirations are engineered into the landscape of the neighbourhood.

The essays in Part 4 foreground cities as sites of translocality, with especial attention to these urban nodes as "critical to the construction of migrant landscapes and the ways in which they reflect and influence migratory movements, politics, identities, and narratives" (p.16). These translocal geographies of cities are demonstrated through a range of major cities such as Page's (chap. 8) research on migrants in Douala and London, Christou's (chap. 9) in Athens, Berlin and New York, and Chacko's (chap. 10) study on Ethiopian diaspora in Washington and Addis Ababa. The empirical materials drawn from these cities not only provide readers a flavour of the political, economic, and socio-cultural diversity to urban spaces, but also shed light on the multiple trajectories in which cities can connect to the global stage. As evinced by the essays, more often than not, these connections can be traced to/from the everyday, and

sometimes mundane, spaces and places.

A key observation in my reading of *Translocal Geographies* is that the collection reiterates some of the concerns raised earlier in studies of transnational migration and diasporas about mobilities-immobilities and movements-sedentarism. These discussions can be neatly captured by Ahmed et al.'s (2003, 1) reminder that "Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached." This poses a profound challenge for students and scholars studying localities, places and migration to be cognizant of the multiple trajectories and connectivities that enable, restrain, or maintain the relationship between fixities and fluidities in migration processes. In my opinion, of parallel significance to the argument that the scale of the 'national' should not be privileged is that subjects of transnational migration should not be limited to the most mobile of migrants. Migration scholars should also start paying more attention to those who 'stay' and 'do not move' in a bid to understand the power geometries involved in the construction of their (im)mobile subjectivities rather than viewing their mobility status as fixed in locales. In this case, Tan and Yeoh have highlighted that non-migrants "should not be understood simply through the idioms of loss, desertation and stasis as often found in popular accounts of these 'left-behind' communities" (p.40). Of course this is not to say that all 'left-behind' members are privileged individuals. Rather, it is an attunement to how agency works in relation to constraints across different sites and scales, allowing us to grasp the moments of instability in these seemingly unwavering structures. As demonstrated by several contributions in the collection, a wider range of methodological tools such as self-directed photography or even shifting attention away from migrants per se to examining shop signage (in Wise's essay) can open up productive dialogues on translocalities.

Translocal Geographies delivers a central message that geography matters in

studying localities, not least because geography can be understood as the relationships between spaces, places and connections. More crucially, the collection makes a compelling argument that localities are products of relations enacted through diverse practices, affects, materialities, imaginaries, and temporalities. Yet if we accept this understanding of the 'local', then there are two theoretical moments which repeat throughout the book that, in my opinion, demands more attention.

First, it is clear that the Brickell and Datta have drawn inspiration from geographer Doreen Massey's (2005) theorization of space to conceptualize translocality. I had anticipated a more complex engagement with Massey's (2005, 158) argument that "there is no coherent 'now' to this place" to fully excavate how different sets of temporalities participate in the politicization of translocal connections and relations. Apart from examining migrants' temporal horizons of pasts, presents and futures, time is also intimately tied to the routinization of transnational practices, rhythmic experiences in places and locales, as well as the affective senses and feelings of time as 'passing', 'slowing', 'accelerating', and 'standing still'. Second, as compared to the efforts dedicated by both editors to 'flatten' the national scale in examining cross-border movements and experiences, there seems to be a lesser concern with how localities can present a similar set of problems as with the 'national'. Page's point that "localism is an ideology" that "establishes a normative view" (p.128) becomes ever more pressing in studies of localities. For example, how different is it to argue that translocalities can draw attention to intersections across various scales, including the national, from Levitt's (2004, 3) point that rather than "privileging one level [e.g. the local] over another, a transnational perspective holds these sites equally and simultaneously in conversation with each other and tries to grapple with the tension between them"?

As much as the book argues that not all translocal connections are transnational, Michael Peter Smith has also noted that “not all transnational connections are translocal” (p.188). It is with this provocation that I find the book an informative, refreshing, and intriguing read. I am confident that *Translocal Geographies* will provide a range of useful theoretical and analytical issues for those interested in the study of localities.

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