

BOOK REVIEWS

***Aspiring to Home: South Asians in America* by Bakirathi Mani.
Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012, 328 pp.
ISBN: 978-0-80477-7995. \$85.00.**

**Reviewed by Arpana G. Inman and Asmita Pendse, *Lehigh University*
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In *Aspiring to Home: South Asians in America*, Bakirathi Mani, an associate professor of English literature at Swarthmore College, takes on an important subject that is close to her own quest of “becoming” South Asian: the diasporic experience of Indian, Bangladeshi, Sri Lankan, and Pakistani communities that have become an important part of the American landscape. She incisively explores how South Asian immigrants develop a sense of identity and community while maintaining their distinct attachments to their homeland. Clearly, Mani is schooled and skilled in and deeply committed to her subject.

Drawing on diverse methodological tools (e.g., ethnography, archival textual analysis, phenomenology), Mani advances a transnational theory of locality that compels the reader to see how the diasporic characters establish themselves within multicultural and postcolonial forms of nationhood. Mani highlights the sense of belonging by weaving a thread between the individual immigrants, their consumption of popular cultural forms of different genres (e.g., art, literature, film/documentaries, blogs, activities/performance), and her own interposing as a participant and consumer of these forms.

In five chapters, Mani addresses various issues such as immigration, postcolonialism, generational differences, identity, nationhood, and citizenship to draw attention to how South Asian culture is depicted and perverted in popular media in the West. Her examples range from popular cultural works created by first- and second-generation South Asians from 1999 to 2009, including those by author Jhumpa Lahiri and filmmaker Mira Nair, as well as public events such as the Miss India U.S.A. pageant, art festivals (i.e., *Diasporadics*, *Desh Pardesh* and *Artwallah*), and the Broadway musical *Bombay Dreams*. Within each of these examples, she highlights how the cultural productions can potentially be a space for multifaceted sites of identity formation for South Asian communities.

Through each of these works, Mani has vigorously critiqued the popular notions of ethnic resistance and solidarity. In her analysis, Mani points to the singular narrative that seems to emerge: that of an upwardly mobile, assimilated community that tends to render the invisible experience of working class, adoptee, queer, and religious (e.g., Muslim, Sikh) communities. She further argues that embodying a middle-class existence in the United States not only distances these immigrants from domestic political movements that relegate South Asian history outside of the temporal and spatial parameters of American citizenship, but also perpetuates a denial of the antiracist and anticolonial movements in the United States. She highlights the contradictions in which middle-class

South Asian Americans both collude with and reify dominant notions (patrilineal, masculine, heterosexual) of belonging in multiple national spaces. As such, Mani notes that it is insufficient to merely “add” South Asian to the ethnic and national origin identifications underlying “Asian American.” She brings into light the complex relationship between the United States and the South Asian subcontinent and behooves a reconceptualization of Asian American studies that moves beyond a focus on U.S. colonialism in East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. She urges us to understand South Asian ethnicity in the context of local racial as well as global movements of immigrant, citizenship, class, capital, and colonization while simultaneously examining U.S. and British imperial interests in South Asia.

Throughout her exploration, Mani makes a critical point that “transnational experiences of belonging are ‘relational and contextual’” (p. 255). South Asian immigrants have always been affected by multifold events, be it political, economic, or social, which has resulted in shifting constructs of their identities—racial or ethnic. For many immigrants, the postcolonial history, independence wars, partitions, and U.S. immigration acts have shaped their ideas of locality. Mani has successfully shown the importance of including such temporal conditions in the literary works such as *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake*. As such, she criticizes Lahiri’s narratives as being devoid of the national and world historical events that shape the relationship between the characters in her stories. She shows how the narratives tend to present linear, individual, and assimilationist experiences, which strengthen the myth of South Asian as a model minority and stands for the universal experience of all South Asians. She notes that the narratives lack explicit acknowledgment of racial difference or generational divides. Relatedly, she brings focus on how locality is embodied differently across generations. For the first generation, there is a struggle between national homelands and creating new ones; for the second generation, being American leaves little space for multiple homelands. Here, Mani calls for a more nuanced understanding that distinguishes locality from citizenship and that takes into consideration the linkage between immigration laws in the United States and economic and political histories and educational infrastructures of labor migration from South Asia.

Importance of such context is also visible in her analysis of documentary films such as *So Far From Home*, *Calcutta Calling*, and *Bangla East Side*. In analyzing documentaries, Mani highlights the important role that visual media can play in correcting mainstream perceptions of the immigrant experience by showcasing the heterogeneity within the community. She questions whether the documentaries do an adequate job in constituting an “authentic” narrative of South Asian immigration. She chastises the filmmakers in producing certain dominant narratives that not only curtail the agentive capacity based in gender or class but also deemphasize the capital, labor, and commodities exchanged between South Asia and the United States. Yet, she also notes challenges in creating and sustaining a collective notion of what it means to be South Asian. Mani also argues for the need to move

beyond binary frameworks of Indian and American that tend to eclipse gendered, class, racial, religious, and sexual experience of immigration and the different structural issues (e.g., patriarchy, class) that pervade relationships in both nations. She notes that framing locality as “cultural conflict” limits our understanding of complex intersectionality of nationalist frameworks of identity. Yet, she highlights how the subjects in her analysis show an assent toward the notion of belongingness that is not just limited to transnationalism and ethnic pluralism but that expands the capacity of dominant discourses of multiculturalism. In addition, Mani also focuses on the intersections of these subjects’ and filmmakers’ identities and their ambiguous subjectivities that reflect through the visual and oral medium.

Mani focuses more on the gendered experiences in the subsequent chapters that represent public events such as beauty pageants and the Broadway musical. These chapters touch on atypical areas of cultural events and how they create ambivalent notions of locality for the young performers, which make them particularly interesting. These chapters effectively show how the South Asian cultural productions are formed by multiple ideologies of nationhood that not only possess capacity to create intense feelings of belonging but are also prone to create contradictory notions of citizenship. Her analysis of the progressive sites of cultural productions such as art festivals goes beyond mere aesthetic appraisals and depicts the emphasis on universal ideology formation. She speaks to the dissonance created in reconciling the public image with the private identification that may not take into account racial, sexual, class, and caste politics that pervade the South Asian American community. Such an intricate analysis would definitely force the reader of this book to consume the popular cultural work in relation to the distinct temporalities and contexts that are unparallel with the context of U.S. citizenship and the normative framework of ethnicity.

Aspiring to Home provides an excellent critique on the representational politics in contemporary Asian American studies and elicits an appreciation for the importance of locality when studying the journey of becoming a South Asian American. Because Mani deals with popular culture and art forms, it would be logical to assume that her book should and would appeal to an audience wider than the scholarly community. Unfortunately, the book is not an easy read for the public audience, which is a pity given that the subject matter is of importance to all. Yet, *Aspiring to Home* could be used as a good resource or supplemental reading for scholars in Asian and psychological studies.

We would like to acknowledge Henry T. Inman, Jr., for his thoughtful comments on this review.

***Handbook of Adult Psychopathology in Asians* edited by Edward C. Chang. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012, 467 pp. ISBN 978-0195179064 (hardcover). \$85.00**

Reviewed by Christina S. Y. Louie and William Ming Liu, The University of Iowa

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Edward Chang’s edited *Handbook of Adult Psychopathology in Asians* delivers a much-needed survey of current research on mental illness in Asian adult populations. Drawing from an array of researchers in medicine and psychology from around the globe, the collection transcends academic disciplines and boundaries to provide a well-informed and well-rounded resource for clinicians. Thorough in its review, each chapter provides background on symptomology, etiology, biological, and cultural factors (ethnic identity) for each disorder. The tone remains consistent throughout the text and all chapters discuss new biological findings and advancements, many of which remain inconclusive but hold potential for future work with the Asian population. For example, research indicating genetic variations in susceptibility to psychopathology provides controversial and interesting considerations.

Chang helpfully divides the handbook into four sections: “Introduction to the Psychology of Asians”, “Diagnosis and Treatment of Adult Psychopathology in Asians”, “Psychopathology and Treatment Models Indigenous to Asia”, and “Conclusion”. The introduction unfolds with a critical evaluation of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV (DSM-IV)* as a global diagnostic tool. Chang challenges the reader to think beyond the confines of what American science considers objectivity and true empiricism to consider research conducted in other cultures and languages, which may abide by conflicting contextual standards. This provides a helpful preface to frame subsequent chapters, which introduce indigenous therapies, culturally specific disorders and examine gaps in current research on psychopathology in Asians.

Chapters on the diagnosis and treatment of adult psychopathology in Asians in Section II address major Axis I disorders such as schizophrenia, somatoform and adjustment disorders. Yeung and Chang underscore a particularly interesting debate relating to the application of mood disorder diagnoses to Asian populations. They highlight that supporters of the *DSM-IV* and International Classification of Diseases—10 argue universal applicability for all populations, regardless of culture. However, deeper examination into Asian culture reveals a tendency to “communicate their distress using somatic symptoms and conceptualize their illness as physical, rather than mental ailments. . .” (p. 109).

Authors broach recurrent themes throughout these chapters that address, challenge, and, at times, support assumptions regarding Asian populations in research, including the underreporting of psychological distress, somatization tendencies, contextual implications of language, and impact of family roles, as well as ethnic identity and acculturation. A number of chapters also address microaggressions and the detrimental effects of subtle discrimination as well as prohibitive effects of the model minority stereotype on diagnosis and identification of pathology.

Beyond these oft-mentioned topics found in the Western psychological literature, authors also shed light on the impact of Asian culture on psychopathology. For example, Mak and colleagues examine culture-related disorders such as neurasthenia. This disorder, once rejected by the *DSM-III* in the 1980s, maintains applicability in China because of its lengthy historical and cultural context. Other authors, such as Tseng et al., discuss culturally specific Asian interventions. For example, Morita therapy, based in Japan, embraces experiencing over logical reasoning. Another cultural influence relates to stigma and labels of disorders in various Asian languages, which seems particularly applicable to