

Asian Migrant Workers in the Arab Gulf States. The Growing Foreign Population and their Lives. Ed. by Masako Ishii *et al.* [The Intimate and the Public in Asian and Global Perspectives, Vol. 10.] Brill, Leiden 2020. xi, 266 pp. Maps. € 99.00; \$120.00. (E-book: € 99.00; \$120.00.)

It is certainly true that, in the past two decades, research concerning migration to the Arabian Peninsula has evolved from a small and surmountable body of scholarship to an expansive, burgeoning accumulation of work that is increasingly central to the interests of an ever more cosmopolitan academia. This edited collection capably joins that conversation, and contributes to it in notable ways. As the editors state right away, this book is a translated and updated version of a collection first published in Tokyo, Japan, in 2014. The collection is built around nine individually authored chapters, interspersed with shorter excursions organized around specific themes and topics. While that structure works fairly well, there are numerous foundational features of the collection that mark it as noteworthy. Foremost – whether a result of the fact that these contributions were first penned in 2014, or perhaps because the truly diverse constellation of global scholars assembled here remain somewhat insulated from the hegemony of American academic concerns, fashions, and trends – this collection altogether manifests an enduring and refreshing set of perspectives on what contributor Md. Mizanur Rahman notes is the largest transnational flow of south-to-south migrants in the contemporary world. In summary, various topics, ideas, and perspectives percolating through this collection have been squelched from the intellectual conversations emanating elsewhere in global academia, and this collection of material ushers them back into circulation.

The focus of the collection is the transnational migration of workers to the Arab Gulf states, those workers' experiences abroad, their relations with the host states and societies, their experiences with the migration system that connects them with opportunities there, and the disparate tethers they maintain to their countries of origin. One of the principal strengths of the collection rests in the commingling of qualitative and quantitative data in the various analyses presented here. Most of the chapters include (and often feature) qualitative ethnographic data in some form or another, but those data are typically framed with quantitative data drawn from a variety of sources, and pertaining to an array of different issues. This mixed-methods approach – increasingly uncommon in American-dominated academia – was a welcome feature of the collection, and, in my mind, spoke to a broader commitment to the social sciences and to the enduring value of empirically grounded research.

Methodologically, the contributions are constructed upon the sort of firsthand presence that proves invaluable to the tone and conviction of the collection. While not all of the chapters are quintessentially emblematic of the craft of ethnography itself, the value of firsthand research – of “being there”, in anthropological parlance – percolates through these analyses. Moreover, we might also glimpse here the enduring value of the classically anthropological gambit – that social and cultural outsiders can, oftentimes, see relations, features, and aspects of a cultural world that an insider would fail to notice. As anthropologist Ruth Benedict once concluded, a fish would hardly take notice of the water in which it swam. In their introductory chapter, Matsuo and his co-editors reiterate their commitment to a broad impartiality scaffolded upon their outsider positionality. This was another realm where the collection felt so refreshingly different from the quotidian emanations of American-dominated academia. Absent here is the researcher's on-the-sleeve commitment to advocacy, the impetus for some

modicum of social change calculated via the researcher's own moral compass, and the comprehensive simplification of humans into the binary calculus of oppressor/oppressed. Instead, the editors explicitly promote nuance, ambivalence, and uncertainty. And they ask questions that would never occur to others ensconced in the dominant academic paradigm: how might we think about transnational migration when inclusion, assimilation, and integration are not central concerns? What sorts of worries and anxieties to domestic workers' employers and sponsors articulate from their vantage points in the asymmetrical social relations constructed by the kafala? Do migrants see benefits to their socio-spatial segregation in Gulf societies, and what sorts of agency to they deploy in these circumstances? In these examples and more, there is a balance and openness, built upon the aspiration to impartiality, which is increasingly rare in contemporary research.

Structurally, the book is divided into two parts. After the entirely useful introduction, the chapters and excursions in Part One concern the institutions and socioeconomic structures characteristic of the Arab Gulf states. Horinuki's initial chapter makes great analytic use of quantitative data, and, amongst other valuable waypoints, directly addresses the Arabian absence of the integrationist policy structures typical of Western countries. In the subsequent chapter, Matsuo's focus on the Arab Gulf States' labor market further establishes a political economic frame for the collection, and he deftly navigates between an analysis of the ground shared by the various Gulf States and the factors that differentiate them from one another. A subsequent pair of excursions penned by Matsuo, Horinuki, and Fukuda briefly tackle the historical emergence of migration in the region, and the expansive development plans behind the region's metastasizing demand for labor. The focus then shifts to the relationships between migrants and their employers: Tsujigami's utterly captivating chapter collates the perspectives and experiences of domestic workers' employers in Saudi Arabia. It is in chapters like this that the editors' articulated commitment to impartiality and analytic balance were most clearly manifest. This was somewhat in contrast to Sabban's subsequent chapter: as the only cultural insider included in the volume, there were fascinating biases and elisions analytically present here that were largely absent from the other chapters. Watanabe's chapter concludes the first part of the book, and analyzes the pre-departure programs in several different sending states – research emblematic of the multi-sited research geography necessary to apprehend the transnational Gulf migration system.

The second part of the book consists of four chapters and three excursions that, together, focus intently on the lived experiences of Asian workers in the Arabian Gulf states, the strategies they deploy for survival, and the networks and communities they form while away from home. Ishii's chapter commences Part Two, and homes in on the formal and informal safety nets that domestic workers from the Philippines establish while abroad in the Gulf States. Hosoda's subsequent chapter – concerning the survival strategies and community formation amongst the Filipino community in the United Arab Emirates, covers similar analytic territory. And Watanabe's chapter (the third in this section), explores the process of religious conversion amongst Christian migrants from the Philippines. These three chapters (and from this reader's vantage point, particularly Hosoda's chapter) seemed to comprise the apex of the collection: framed with quantitative data; electric with illuminating qualitative detail; curious and attentive to the experiences and perspectives of others; open to the ambivalences and contradictions of humanity; these three chapters helpfully illuminated the experiences of a portion of the foreign workforce that has been notoriously difficult to access. Matsukawa's chapter is the last full chapter in the book, and in its concern with the Indian Goan diaspora in Arabia, the analysis usefully demonstrates that the communities

of migrants that we oftentimes treat as a singular whole are, upon closer inspection, replete with hierarchies and differences themselves. Matsukawa impressively makes that point while simultaneously helping readers see the integral cohesion discernible in these durable subnational communities of migrants.

The three excursions that conclude the book are brief but invaluable. Rahman's yields some basic detail about the Bangladeshi component of the foreign workforce in Arabia and their experiences in this transnational migration system. More specifically, the excursus helps readers grapple with how the visa bureaucracies and forms appear to potential Bangladeshi migrants: his descriptions of work visas, flying visas, and free visas barely slaked our thirst for more detail and discussion. Janardhan's excursus – really more of a personal essay (or, nowadays, an “auto-ethnography” perhaps) – was both multifaceted and intellectually titillating. Indeed, it is the sorts of experiences and sentiments expressed here – ambivalent, nuanced, equivocal, uncertain, considerate – that, through a process of omission, selective listening, and elision, frequently get whittled down and marshaled into the dominant academic narratives that occupy the academic limelight. To encounter those experiences and sentiments in their holistic form was absolutely welcome. Finally, Matsukawa and Hosada's concluding excursus briefly portrays the panoply of educational opportunities that migrants' children face in the Arab Gulf States, and how their careers and aspirations are mapped on those opportunities.

In summary, this collection is a welcome addition to the growing canon of work concerned with migrants and migration to the Arab Gulf States. Any book that trains its focus on the superdiverse demographic concoctions typical of the region might be criticized for its omissions, but this is to be expected: the coagulation of research concerning migrants from the Philippines present in this collection, for example, only illuminates the absence of attention to other national communities of migrants. And English is obviously not the first language for most of these authors – there are typos and grammatical slippages that pepper the book. But this “criticism” points to what I suggest is the most valuable aspect of this book: in drawing together a group of contributors whose academic footprints were largely crafted outside the citadel of Western academia, this edited collection visits numerous topics, ideas, and perspectives that would otherwise never breach the surface in our growingly cosmopolitan academic network. Amidst the centripetal pressures and homogeneity of global academia, the ideological diversity manifest in this collection has a clear value to us all.

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**Workers' Inquiry and Global Class Struggle. Strategies, Tactics, Objectives.**  
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The rise of neoliberalism has dealt a blow to labour movements worldwide. In response, a new generation of scholars has started to document and examine the strategies, tactics, and