
Judith Misrahi-Barak and Claudine Raynaud, eds. *Diasporas, Cultures of Mobilities, 'Race': 1. Diasporas and Cultures of Migrations*. Montpellier: Presses Universitaires de la Méditerranée, 2014. Pp. 376. NZ\$33/\$30CAD.

Since the late 1980s, the term “diaspora” has gained widespread currency: Rogers Brubaker reported in 2005 that a Google search for the word yielded a million hits, most of which were not academic (1). Its use and meaning have become “slippery” (Misrahi-Barak and Raynaud 12). Initially restricted to refer to the migration of specific groups around the Mediterranean, it is now “a privileged term . . . used broadly to denote a number of different kinds of . . . situations of mobility” (Edwards 81). In their introduction to *Diasporas, Cultures of Mobilities, 'Race': 1. Diasporas and Cultures of Migrations*, editors Judith Misrahi-Barak and Claudine Raynaud quote Khachig Tölölyan in stating that diaspora study investigates “the history, culture, social structure, politics, and economics” of traditional diasporas and “new transnational dispersions” (13).

Misrahi-Barak and Raynaud agree that diaspora studies is “firmly grounded on interdisciplinarity” (11). The essays in *Diasporas, Cultures of Mobilities, 'Race,'* however, tend to cluster primarily around cultural responses to transnational dispersals. Almost all of the sixteen contributors declare literary/cultural studies affiliations. The two exceptions are Louise Cainkar (a sociologist) and Lars Hinrichs (a sociolinguist). The editors explain the volume’s disciplinary inclination:

It is a truism to affirm that the literary text displays not only the mirror of the contemporary world, but also elements for an understanding of the consciousness and the elusive ‘identity’ of the diasporic subject. At its best, re-presentations also contain epistemological resources. Where the social sciences supply analyses and figures, fiction, poetry, art work, in short cultural productions, may even anticipate the insights delivered by objective data. (Misrahi-Barak and Raynaud 15–16)

Some discursive/disciplinary clustering must surely be inescapable in a collection of this sort: because diaspora studies comprehends a catholic field, only an encyclopaedia could adequately address the diverse concerns of scholars. The book's restricted scope is thus unsurprising; it is also a strength, allowing for fuller coverage of the circumscribed area. Readers whose interest in diaspora studies is linked to "aesthetic and literary representations" (Misrahi-Barak and Raynaud 18) will find much of value. However, scholars whose research in diaspora studies is aligned with fields like political science, international relations, public policy, economics, law, sociology, geography, eco-criticism, and anthropology are likely to find fewer rewards.

The book is divided into four parts. The four essays in Part One "map the different theoretical borders, territories and taxonomies associated with diaspora" (Misrahi-Barak and Raynaud 19). It is in this section of the volume that diaspora researchers in social sciences and related subject areas are likely to find fertile material. Françoise Lionnet challenges conventional notions of cosmopolitanism as surplus and creolisation as deficit, bringing them into dialogue in relation to the "Creole Indian Ocean" (32). Ashraf Rushdy, in a thought-provoking essay, uses the example of the African diaspora (a term which he suggests refuses essentialism, racial or other, and insists on difference) to examine two discourses employed to understand social relations in the wake of a rupture: diasporic and political apology. Shu-mei Shih critiques the category of "the Chinese diaspora" (76), which she argues is "complicit with China's nationalist calling to the 'overseas Chinese'" and "unwittingly correlates with and reinforces the Western and other non-Western . . . racialized construction of Chineseness as perpetually foreign" (79). She proposes, as an alternative, Sinophone studies.

The three essays in Part Two focus more narrowly on particular cultural texts. Mireille Rosella examines identity politics of the transitional Roma community as represented in Tony Gatliff's film *Gadjo Dilo*. Johan Jacobs analyses internal displacement and diaspora in Njabulo Ndebele's novel *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* and Bénédicte Ledent reads Caryl Phillips' novel *In the Falling Snow*, not as a "mere [illustration] of existing theories" but as a springboard "towards further conceptualization or re-conceptualization" (162) by which concepts such as migration, diaspora, and globalization can be distinguished from one another.

There are four essays in Part Three. Corinne Duboin considers the contribution of the writing of "emergent African immigrant writers" to the "rising hybridization" of African-American literature (Misrahi-Barak and Raynaud 22). Shantini Pillai discusses "the transnational negotiations of memory and space in two novels by contemporary diasporic Malaysian writers," Preeta Samarasan and Hsu Ming Teo (197). Cainkar conducts a sociological analysis

of “the discrepancies that have sneaked into the perceptions [of the homeland] of young Arab Americans whose parents have taken them ‘back home’” for short periods (Misrahi-Barak and Raynaud 23). Comparing the data from recent face-to-face interviews with forty-five Palestinian American youth with earlier findings and quoting Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, Cainkar concludes that “in a transnational world . . . the media impact complexly on national identity and communal belonging” (qtd. in Cainkar 232). Hinrichs’ sociolinguistic study of the dialect mix occurring in Toronto’s Jamaican-Canadian community makes a case for the creation of “solid empirical foundations for theory” (262) while agreeing with Jan Blommaert that “sociolinguistics must stay mindful of the ‘messy’ conditions of diasporic language mixing” (262). The essays in this section are characterised by their focus on issues concerning contemporary diasporic cultural practices. In Part Four, the essays by Adlai Murdoch and Janet Wilson take a longer historical view.

The title of Part Four, “Diasporic Subjects: Plural, Gendered and Queer,” points to the foci of the final three chapters: Murdoch’s impressive essay focuses on inward and outward migrations that have made the francophone Caribbean “both a diasporized and a creolized society” (275); Wilson considers four New Zealand “white settler women” and how, in their work, “constructions of gender and filiations are destabilized” (Misrahi-Barak and Raynaud 24); and Christine Vogt-Williams discusses “the performance of diasporic identities” (Misrahi-Barak and Raynaud 25) in Shyam Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* and Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*, arguing that “diaspora and queerness are imbricate” in the novels (Misrahi-Barak and Raynaud 24).

Some annoying lapses in proofreading notwithstanding, the collection as a whole adds to the conceptual breadth and depth of diaspora studies. Many essays use cultural texts to inspire lines of inquiry that enrich diaspora studies as a field; others prioritize an issue related to the home discipline of the author and use concepts germane to diaspora studies as tools to analyse the text in question. Both approaches—working to advance the conceptual tools of diaspora studies or employing the conceptual tools of diaspora studies to advance the understanding of particular cultural texts—have value.

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Works Cited

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